"I had not thought death had undone so many": Katabasis in Eliot's *The Waste Land*

Research Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with research distinction in English in the undergraduate colleges of The Ohio State University

by

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The Ohio State University May 2018

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Introduction

Of the many works referenced in Eliotôs *The Waste Land*, Danteôs *Divine Comedy* holds the most prominent position. Eliotôs dedication to Pound on the title page alludes to a line from *Purgatorio*, and Dante makes an appearance in every section of the poem, either by direct quote or veiled allusion. Such an association brings Danteôs journey through the Underworld to the forefront of the mind when reading *The Waste Land,* and provides one of the easiest avenues toward unpacking the poemôs density. But I propose that the poemôs exploration of the Underworld extends beyond a kinship to Dante and toward a deeper structural and thematic debt to the narrative of the katabasis, the descent into the Underworld. I suggest that the five parts of *The Waste Land* can be united via a traditional katabasis narrative, a narrative of metamorphosis and self-refinement.

The katabasis is only one of the many classical and mythological structures Eliot employs throughout the poem. Already thoroughly explored in criticism are his use of the Grail legend[1] and the burial and rebirth of a dying god figure. Less so is the appearance of the katabasis in the poem. The poemôs debt to Dante is obvious, but the presence of katabasis extends beyond Eliot quoting pieces of *Inferno*. The entire poem contains the narrative movements of the katabasis, and reading the poem in this manner allows for a better understanding of the motifs that Eliot uses throughout to unify the piece. But I hope to go beyond a simple close reading and consider the effects of the imposition of narrative onto a poem like *The Waste Land*, which is distinctly not a narrative poem.

[1] Eliot himself admits the influence of Jessie Weston's exploration of the grail legend in "From Ritual to Romance" in the notes to *The Waste Land,* saying, "Miss Weston's book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do" (Eliot and North 21). Similarly, he cites the influence of Dante in many lectures and essays in years following the poem's publication.

The Waste Land begins not altogether too dissimilar to a narrative poem. There is a sort of scene setting, an invocation of April and the seasons, that eventually winds its way to an ñusò, which assigns the entire stanza to the thought/speech of a specific consciousness. This speaker will later become more defined as ñMarieò. So far, *The Waste Land* has a narrative to some degree in that it follows a specific consciousness. Chaucerôs *Canterbury Tales*, a wholly narrative poem, opens on a similar note, talking of April showers and following a series of implications to the introduction of the pilgrims. But where Chaucerôs pilgrims will remain the focus of the rest of the work, Marie disappears in the gap between the first stanza and the next and is not heard from again. Another voice, seemingly unrelated, replaces her. And while I treat the voice that follows Marie as the one that will recur for the rest of the poem, it could easily be argued that this voice in turn disappears shortly thereafter. This shifting illustrates the main difficulty in treating *The Waste Land* as a narrative poem; it simply does not behave like one. *The Waste Land* follows particular characters but eludes easy narrative by shifting form just as soon as it finds it. Finding the narrative requires unpacking images and references and finding the ways that they connect. The poemôs unified vision comes from assembling links between these characters and the poemôs leading voice that guides them.

Given the sheer breadth of ideas Eliot works into the poem, I will only be able to approach it from a more narrowed conception. I owe a good deal of my interpretation to Calvin Bedient for his book ñHe Do the Police in Different Voicesò. Bedientôs conception of a protagonist to the story (who I will refer to as ñthe Speakerò) as a central character of the poem allows for a unity to the disconnected parts of the poem. Like Bedient, I consider the poem to be the thoughts and actions of one specific figure, and in this figureôs changes across the poem I

find the narrative. I disagree with both Bedientôs interpretation and rhetoric on several counts, which I will address shortly, but his analysis was instrumental in my understanding of the poem.

The poem as a whole relates this Speakerôs journeys around London as he grapples with some inner turmoil. The poem describes many movements of an ñIò figure and cites specific landmarks of the city. London Bridge and the churches of St. Mary Woolnoth and St. Magnus Martyr all feature, as does a river that can only be the Thames. At several points the poem explicitly follows one character in these places. I simply argue for the unification of these moments with the rest of the poemôs less distinct settings within the figure of the Speaker. In his troubled state the Speaker takes his surroundings and imposes the Underworld upon them, with his wanderings taking the form of the katabasis.

The opening *Inferno* comes to mind. Like Dante, the Speaker is introduced ñIn the middle of the journey of our lifeò (Alighieri 1) the specifics of his history are omitted. The Speaker outlines his state early in the poem in reference to his conversation with the Hyacinth Girl, saying, ñI could not/Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither/living nor dead, and I knew nothing,/Looking into the heart of light, the silenceò (lines 38-41). This conversation is the only glimpse into the Speakerôs past and leaves him a pseudo character, only visible through the words he speaks. Eliotôs strained marriage and psychological issues, as well as the general experience of life in Europe following The Great War, offer possible source for the Speakerôs condition, but a reason is not necessary. Bedient cites ña loss of romantic belief in the vicinity of the Hyacinth Gardenò (Bedient 60), while A.D. Moody places the poem in the midst of a ñcrisis of civilizationò (Moody 56). Yet in ñTradition and the Individual Talentò Eliot argues for a separation between ñthe man who suffers and the mind which createsò (Eliot 54). The poem then, must be considered separately from Eliot himself, even as the two may seem inextricable.

While Eliotôs life may give clues, *The Waste Land* is not intended to be an adaptation of it, and thus is capable of standing on its own. If there is a narrative to the poem, then it will be contained wholly within the poem itself.

This turmoil renders the Speaker death-obsessed and mute. Instead, he speaks with the voices of others long dead, through the fragments of old art that seemingly insert themselves into his consciousness. They are his way of interacting with and making sense of the world, establishing a link between the present and the past, between reality and reality as understood through art. Eliot addresses the use of art as a sense-making system in his essay ñPoetry and Dramaò, even directly invoking Dante, saying

> it is ultimately the function of art, in imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of an order *in* reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness, and reconciliation; and then leave us, as Virgil left Dante, to proceed toward a region where that guide can avail us no farther (ñPoetry and Poetsò 94)

The katabasis is, in part, a journey of discovery through this concept of fragmented art. As the Speaker journeys around London, he considers all that he sees through the lens of these fragments, developing an understanding of the world and his place in it in the process.

"Fragments"

Eliotôs use of fragments is important to consider for two reasons. First, due to their constant presence in the poem, they must be considered and made sense of. Simply acknowledging that they exist and force the reader to make connections between *The Waste Land* only goes halfway. Plenty of works are heavily allusive; fewer are built so solidly on allusion as *The Waste Land* is. In ñWhat Dante Means to Meò Eliot discusses his use of Dante with the

clerks on the bridge to ñestablish a relationship between the medieval inferno and modern lifeò (ñTo criticize the criticò 128), and goes on to say that the reader ñwould have missed the point if he did not recognize itò (128). Nearly every section of the poem has this same expectation of the reader, and it is important to consider why the poem is so deeply tied to this allusive process. Second, the fragments dominate the poemôs closing moments, with the final stanza being nearly solely composed of fragments. From a narrative perspective, understanding where the poem leaves off is important to gain some sense of its overall attitude and conclusions. As the fragments are the Speakerôs way of making sense of the world, how he eventually decides to use them reveals how he has come to view and react to the world.

Of the final eight lines of the poem, only one is wholly originally Eliotôs: line 430, ñThese fragments I have shored against my ruinsò. This is the last line without a direct source that Eliot references, and it is the most important line of the poem, as it explains the polyphony of quotations and allusions Eliot has made throughout. The line is nestled among several other quotations in different languages[2]: a bit of *Purgatorio* in Italian in 427, a Latin line from *Pervigilium Venus* in 428 (with an English interjection of Eliotôs that provides a link to the earlier references to Philomela), and part of ñEl Desdichadoò in 429. After line 430, Eliot introduces another reference, this time to ñThe Spanish Tragedyò, by juxtaposing in two separate sentences a line of Hieronymoôs and the subtitle of the play itself. I will address the importance of these lines later during my analysis of ñWhat the Thunder Saidò, as they serve as both a summation of the poem and a conclusion to the Speakerôs metamorphosis. I introduce them now to get at the importance of the word ñfragmentsò from line 430. Eliot writes ñthese fragmentsò, implying that lines 427-429 are fragments. Fragments of what? Other works, obviously, but

[2] The sources of these quotations are derived from Michael North's notes on pages 19-20 of the Norton edition of *The Waste Land*.

fragments of the entire tradition of European literature, from which Eliot draws to construct his poem and signal the movements of its action. Eliot expands the definition from direct quotes by introducing ñOh swallow, swallowò to line 428. Eliotôs addition is still encapsulated in the grouping that ñtheseò implies, but it is an addition of Eliotôs that modifies the bit he draws unchanged from the *Pervigilium*. Rather than simply quote it, he adds a few words in English that establish a connection to the poemôs many references to Tereus and Philomela. Eliot directly quotes the fragment, while at the same time modifying it. In this way, Eliotôs fragments are not necessarily limited to direct quotations, but to allusions to works and Eliotôs own reinterpreted use of the works.

Fragments populate *The Waste Land*, sometimes obviously, other times more subtly. They act as the driving force of the Speakerôs voice; everything he sees has some analogue in the history of literature, and creating this link is his way of seeing the world and making sense of what he sees. The katabasis itself is a fragment, as it is not a genre itself. The journey to the underworld is instead a feature of other genres, contributing to the greater whole of an epic like *The Aeneid* without becoming a dominating presence. The fragments as they first appear are, well, fragmented. They sail into the Speakerôs thought without warning and leave shortly after, and demonstrate the Speakerôs inability to properly order his world. The fragments should do the trick, should stabilize him, but he is unable to make them work. The knowledge he finds in the katabasis will be this control over the fragments, which he will use to reassemble himself and buttress against future ruin. Anything the Speaker encounters can be better processed when he juxtaposes it with myth, or addresses it through poetic tools such as rhyme or meter. The fragments are an attempt at bringing stability to the Speakerôs life.

Bedient and narrativization

While the centerpiece of my argument is how *The Waste Land* might be viewed as narrative and why such a perspective is worth consideration, it is just as important to consider the many ways the poem resists this view. If ñThe Divine Comedyò and ñThe Aeneidò are examples of narrative poems, that is stories told in verse, then ñThe Waste Landò is surely not one. The poem does introduce and develop defined characters or plot points. It is possible, as Bedient attempts, to draw from the poem complete narrative, but such attempts are doomed to fail. With a poem as fragmented and polyphonic as ñThe Waste Landò no single interpretation can unite every line into a unified narrative.

While I will be identifying the katabasis narrative within the poem, I do not believe *The Waste Land* is itself a narrative poem. It has narrative elements, and the earlier drafts suggest more coherent narrative threads, such as the first draftôs opening page, which included a clear narrative with specified characters and dialogue between them. A more recognizable ñBurial of the Deadò followed and survived many later edits (ñFacsimileò 4-7). But even as Eliot and Pound reduced or completely eliminated the more narrative sections, they remain in the DNA of the poem. The surviving sections remain linked to them and there exists a sense of progression and development throughout the poem that suggests a narrative even if it doesnôt quite relate one clearly.

The distinction of a ñnarrative poemò vs. a ñpoem with narrative elementsò is a fine one, but also, I think, an important one. The former suggests a poem that intends to communicate a story, with clearly defined characters and plot events. The katabasis of Orpheus, for example, has defined characters in Orpheus and Eurydice, stakes in Eurydiceôs death, and drama in Orpheusôs failure to heed the orders of Pluto. *The Waste Land* is certainly not that, and can just as easily be read as a polyphony of disconnected voices. Rather, I think the katabasis can be found within the

poem, not dominating it but guiding it and providing an avenue to create better connections between the range of allusions in the poem. To consider it with elements of narrative allows for an attempted conclusion to the various motifs Eliot uses to create links between five sections which, at first glance may seem completely separate. The presence of water in the poem, or the use of fragments from other works, for example, can be assessed and examined to create links between the sometimes seemingly disconnected sections. Using the katabasis narrative as a unifying structure within the poem identifies a sense of development and progression across the poem.

Herein lie my most basic objections to Calvin Bedientôs approach, as he draws *The Waste Land* too fully into narrative. Bedient suggests that not only is there a Speaker, but all voices derive from him in a sort of ventriloquist act, saying ñI argue for the view that all the voices in the poem are the performances of a single protagonist ï not Tiresias but a nameless stand-in for Eliot himselfò (Bedient ix) The idea that all characters and voices of the poem are all derived from this one Speaker is certainly a defensible one, and the original title of Eliotôs poem certainly implies something to this effect. The Speaker does change form and take on other voices (metamorphosis will ultimately be the key to his salvation), but there are other separate characters in the poem who cannot be easily incorporated into one Speaker. And the strain of the individual facing the rest of society is an important aspect of the poem that might be lost if the other characters were obscured in the manner Bedient suggests.

Bedient also argues for narrative moments without an exact source in the poem, offering a condensed summary early in the book that includes moments such as a marriage to ñBelladonna, The Lady of the Rocks ï a fiery Medusa who turns his penis to stoneò (Bedient 60). The problem with this suggestion, and others, is not the idea at its core; failing marriages

and fear of impotence are certainly present in the poem. The issue comes into play when dealing with the poemôs narrative voice. It does not offer solid moments of narrative in the way Bedient suggests. Rather, the poem presents images and ideas that connect and orbit common goals. The Lady of the Rocks and an impotent marriage are both directly present in the poem, and links can be drawn between the two. But at no point is a direct relation between the two demanded. The voice of *The Waste Land* is not one to establish a coherent through line. It is instead kaleidoscopic, branching outward depending on the angle one views it from. It invites comparison between its various components, a process that establishes unity and develops ideas across the poem. And as Pound suggests in his description of the poem as the ñlongest poem in the English langwidge [sic]ò (Litz 56) comparisons and links to other texts can be made *ad infinitum*. Simply put, *The Waste Land* is a poem that asks for unity and rewards the search for it, but can never quite be fully ordered. While Bedient makes his case, to complete his reading he must eventually step outside of the poem. And in the process the poem itself becomes more of a canvas for Bedientôs interpretation than a work itself. Every line of the poem must fulfill part of Bedientôs theory, to the degree that he begins to work in assumptions and ideas that are not necessarily present. He performs a dedicated close reading of the entire work, which is a worthy exercise in identifying the many ways that the poemôs varied voices *do* connect. But Bedientôs response to a section that does not easily fit into his interpretation is to bend it until it does.

The Katabasis narrative

My understanding of the katabasis narrative draws heavily on Rachel Falconerôs ñHell in Contemporary Literatureò, which charts the features of the katabasis and how they appear in different works. In this text, Falconer identifies and discusses various forms and traditions of the katabasis, examining them in action by analyzing Hell in various stories. Katabasis (literally ña

going downò) refers to a descent into the Underworld or Hell found throughout literature. The plot device involves a range of permutations and conclusions, but there are several commonalities. In the katabasis story, the living hero enters the world of the dead, typically led by a guide who has some special knowledge[3]. The purpose of the journey varies, but the hero often intends to make contact with the dead and in the process gain knowledge. Falconer defines the journey as ñabout coming to know the self, regaining someone or something lost, or acquiring superhuman powers or knowledgeò (Falconer 3). Whether the hero succeeds in his intended goal or not, the journey is both personally transformative and revelatory with regards to the self and rest of the world.

While *The Divine Comedy* remains the biggest source for Eliotôs katabasis, I will also draw from Book VI of *The Aeneid*[4]. *The Waste Land* employs some katabatic traditions that appear in *The Aeneid* but not *Inferno,* and the epigraph even references Aeneasôs guide, the Sibyl of Cumae. The Speakerôs descent begins at London Bridge with an allusion to Dante: ñso many,/I had not thought death had undone so many.ò (lines 62-63, North 7). And this allusion is not even the first of the many throughout the poem. Technically, of Danteôs epic, only *Inferno* is a true katabasis; Danteôs journey extends far beyond Hell. But Eliot references *Purgatorio* almost as much as he does *Inferno*, and Danteôs transformative journey, which the Speaker mimics, does not find its resolution until the end of *Paradiso*. Danteôs journeys, the specifics of which I will address as they become relevant but hardly bear full inventorying here, inform the general arc of the poem. Danteôs journey is one of revelation and purification. He encounters sin in all of its forms, then penance and purification which allows him to extend beyond his limited human scope and reach God and the Absolute. The Speaker is fated to follow the same

[3] Falconer refers to "a guide from the otherworld sent to recover the person lost" (Falconer 43)
[4] For the purpose of this paper I use Seamus Heaney's standalone translation of Book VI

movements as Dante. He will descend into Hell and explore evil and sin, which will eventually drive him to purifying penance that will absolve him and reform him as something stronger.

The Waste Land acts as a response to *The Divine Comedy*, a charting of the same course through different (though not too much so) methods. Both follow the same transformative arc. Both are indebted to referencing pre-established works. Dante weds Medieval theology with classical mythology, while Eliot takes the same and adds Shakespeare and other voices from throughout European literature. Eliot endeavors to take Dante into the contemporary world. And while links between Eliotôs religious awakening can and have been made with the poem, *The Waste Land* serves as a sort of secularization *The Divine Comedy*. The setting is not the epicôs titular allegorical spaces, but the dirty streets of London. Salvation and enlightenment come not through religion but literature and song, human art. Dante ultimately encounters God, while The Speaker arms himself with fragments of literature from across history, Dante included, to reform and defend himself against future struggle. Eliotôs is fragmented because his journey is not out of sin, but of the fragmented, wasted world of postwar Europe. Simply put, the two works are inseparable, because Eliot wanted them to be so. Danteôs katabasis is laced throughout *The Waste Land* because Eliot ultimately strives for the same goal.

Falconerôs book also identifies a handful of specific features recurrent in the katabasis. Her list is fairly exhaustive, and a work need not check every box to qualify as a katabasis. The ones most relevant to Eliotôs work are:

- ñA person lost in a wood, labyrinth or trackless oceanò (the labyrinth of London, and the ocean of ñDeath by Waterò)
- ñA threshold crossing, often through some gateway inscribed with an apotropaic messageò (London Bridge, with the warning imposed by the Speaker himself)

- ñA river crossingò and ñsouls crowding the shoreò (also London Bridge)
- ña Lethean lake of forgetfulnessò (the ocean of ñDeath by Waterò)

A typical feature of the katabasis that Falconer does not include, but can nonetheless be seen in many narratives, is that the hero acts as more of an observer in his wanderings. The descent is not a violent journey, and the hero rarely attempts to disrupt the underworld. When Aeneas encounters monstrous apparitions in the Underworld, Heaney notes that ñhad not his guide/In her wisdom forewarned him/é he would have charged/And tried to draw blood from shadowsò (Heaney lines 386-391). The hero encounters the Underworld, but only ever as an observer, unable to affect it or help any of its inhabitants.

Section 1: "The Burial of the Dead"

"What are the roots that clutch?"

ñWhat are the roots that clutch, what branches grow/Out of this stony rubbish?ò (lines 19-20) a voice asks, introducing both the Speaker and the world around him. This stanza depicts a desert space of rocks, dead trees, and dust, which acts as both a metaphor for the world of the Speaker and a physical representation of his own deadness. Lines 19 and 20 ask for some measure of hope for this waste, for roots clinging to life and anything growing at all. But whether such a presence exists is not yet known, for the voice replies to itself ñYou cannot say, or guess, for you know only/A heap of broken imagesò (lines 21-22). The Speakerôs deadness is a personal problem, an inability to speak and a disorganization of his thoughts and thus his ability to perceive and process the world. But the condition extends beyond him, a response to the world around him and his own understanding of it. The fragments, his means of bridging the gap between himself and the rest of the world, are scattered and useless.

Silence

Despite being the voice behind the poem, the Speaker rarely actually speaks aloud. He narrates various encounters with other figures, but he is either a listener or observer. This silence acts as a sort of refuge wherein he does not act, but cannot be harmed. The first interaction described by the Speaker is with the Hyacinth Girl, whose lines are quoted speech. ñóYou gave me Hyacinths first a year ago;/They called me the hyacinth girlôò (lines 35-36), she says, lines spoken aloud. In contrast, the Speakerôs response, unquoted, reads, ñI could not/Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither/living nor dead, and I knew nothing,/Looking into the heart of light, the silenceò (lines 38-41). In this description the Speaker casts himself as a being on the periphery of everything, unable to speak or truly think, practically dead and yet living. Bedient identifies ñthe heart of light, the silenceò as a truth that cannot be conveyed in words (Bedient 43-47), and likens it to Danteôs Beatrice as a guiding principle to strive for. I disagree on this point; the Speakerôs silence is less a freeing, guiding principle and more of a prison. His thoughts and words, the two things that elevate him beyond a dumb beast, fail when he allows himself to fall into silence. He is safe within the heart of light, but only because it allows him to avoid the world that he is unable to make sense of.

The way out, then, requires the Speaker come to grips with the rest of the world. He cannot simply overcome his own paralysis, as it is intrinsically tied to the world he inhabits; he must diagnose the world around him and determine how to navigate it. Only then will his fragmented mind be able to make sense of things. The katabasis will be the Speakerôs encounter with the world he withdraws from. In the process he will strike at the heart of the modern Waste Land, make sense of it through his fragmented images, and regain his voice.

In this way, both Bedient and Moody are right. Bedient casts the Speakerôs silence as an interpersonal issue, a failing of his own beliefs brought on by a lack of faith in other people. While this is true, it makes more sense when paired with Moodyôs crisis. The Speaker has not simply had a run of bad luck in the people he encounters; civilization itself is damaged at the heart.

Madame Sosotris

Before their proper descent, both Dante and Aeneas encounter a guide figure who introduces the katabasis and ultimately leads them through the journey. Dante is saved from the three beasts by Virgil and taken to the Underworld, while the Sibyl of Cumae guides Virgil through the necessary rituals to begin the descent. Falconer cites ña guide from the otherworld sent to recover the person lostò (Falconer 43) as a typical feature of the narrative. *The Waste Land* fulfills this narrative feature, but at a slant. The poemôs most visible prophetic figure is Madame Sosostris, seemingly a fully human fortune teller rather than a figure from beyond in the way of Virgil. Sosostris, however, does forecast the Speakerôs experiences, telling his fortune to see various images that include ñthe drowned Phoenician Sailorò (line 46), ñBelladonna, the Lady of the Rocksò (line 49), ñthe one-eyed merchantò (line 52), and ñcrowds of people, walking round in a ringò (line 56), among others. The sailor and merchant are Phlebas and Eugenides, respectively, figures that appear later in the poem, while the Lady of the Rocks could be any of a number of women encountered. The crowd foresees the crowded bridge that the Speaker will shortly see, with the circular nature of their wandering recalling both the ring structure of Danteôs hell and the image of a circular history.

“A crowd flowed over London Bridge”

The Speakerôs descent into the Underworld begins at London Bridge in the final section of ñThe Burial of the Deadò. He witnesses a crowd of business clerks marching across the bridge to work and a fragment from *Inferno* transforms them into the dead of the Underworld. The quote, ñso many,/I had not thought death had undone so manyò (line 63-64), signals the moment of transition, with the Speaker now mixing in among the dead. The first step to many descent stories is the crossing of the River Acheron[5], the river bordering the worlds of the living and dead. Nearly every katabatic hero (Aeneas and Dante, but also Orpheus and Hercules) cross the river, typically via the ferry of Charon the boatman. The river is typically marked by the souls of the dead crowding its banks, some of which the hero may know. The one time the Speaker does actually speak is at the end of ñThe Burial of the Deadò, to Stetson on the bridge. ñThere I saw one I knew and I stopped him, crying, óStetson!/óYou who were with me in the ships at Mylaeôò (lines 69-70). His verbal speech reflects his thought process, creating a link between the living man before him and the soul of a long-dead sailor. The encounter recalls Aeneasôs encounter with his helmsman Palinurus, who waits on the banks of Acheron when Aeneas first arrives into the Underworld.

From this point on, the Speakerôs experiences double as a journey through the Underworld. I do not mean to suggest a metaphysical aspect to the poem, in fact quite the opposite. The things the Speaker sees are wholly mundane beneath the mountain of allusions he conjures. The katabatic structure acts as a juxtaposing force. Though what the Speaker sees is wholly real, he portrays it as Hell itself. The katabasis, along with the other fragments, places the modern world not at the apex of history, but at the bottom, drowning under its weight. In performing the katabasis the Speaker will learn to plumb the depths of this fallen modern world.

[5] The river that is crossed into the Underworld seems to be interchangeably called Styx or Acheron. My translations of both *Inferno* and *The Aeneid* used for this paper use "Acheron".

Section 2: “A Game of Chess”

The katabatic encounters

The bulk of the katabasis narrative involves the heroôs encounter with the denizens of the Underworld, often a combination of monsters and the souls of the dead, typically being punished or tortured. The journey brings the hero face to face with various forms of sin and evil. Much of Danteôs journey, for example, is focused on his tour of the nine circles and the many prisoners trapped there, which educates him about sin and becomes the first step in his journey toward salvation. The Underworld of ñInfernoò is highly organized, a series of increasingly harsh punishments for increasingly worse crimes. The narrative of the poem is dependent on the progression through these steps, but the katabasis does not always follow such a defined path. The Underworld seen in book VI of ñThe Aeneidò still has a logic and organization, but Aeneasôs path through is not quite so regimented. He begins by encountering personifications of negative things, such as disease and poverty, and goes on to interact with the souls of the dead. Some he knows, like Dido and his departed comrades, while others he simply observes, souls being judged and punished.

In both stories, the journey requires a sort of tour of the Underworld before the destination can be reached. Falconer identifies this feature of the narrative as ña series of graded punishments increasing in severity as the traveller descends lowerò that will lead to ñan encounter with the demonic Other (usually Dis/Hades, Satan or some other manifestation of abjection, terror or despair)ò (Falconer 43) that will test and refine the hero. The encounters along the journey may not always be extremely relevant to the ultimate goal, but they serve

several purposes depending on the narrative being told. Often they are a warning, an example of the punishment that comes with death. The dead can also be an obstacle or distraction, as they often are for Aeneas, pleading for his help and keeping him still until the Sibyl warns them away. Regardless of the exact tone the interaction takes, it is typically an illuminating experience that contributes to the eventual knowledge gained through the katabasis. Dante gains intimate knowledge of sin and its punishments, knowledge that enables him to continue his journey toward purification and the absolute. Aeneas encounters shades from his own past (dead comrades and enemies from the war, the spirit of Dido) in order to prepare him for Anchisesô glimpse of the future that awaits in Italy. The journey is not merely a series of obstacles; it is a learning experience that allows for the attainment of knowledge at the end of the journey.

The encounters often orbit a specific concept but do not follow a highly regimented narrative; one encounter does not necessarily predict or require the next. Rather, each one is somehow different than the one before, illuminating a different feature of the Underworld and touching on a different sort of fate for the dead. However, there is still a sense of organization; the encounters do typically get progressively more intense. The punishments of Danteôs hell grow progressively worse, the prisoners increasingly more frightful, until Dante finally encounters Satan at Hellôs center. Aeneas begins viewing abstract representations of negative concepts and eventually finds souls being punished by the furies. This section of the journey is a harrowing series of events that will ultimately be relieved by the heroôs completion of the journey and eventual ascent back to the world of the living. This organization creates a sense of progression through the journey and a narrative can be drawn from it: the hero descends, faces a series of increasingly troubling sights, and is ultimately changed by the knowledge gained.

*The Waste Land*ôs Speaker follows this structure in his encounters with a series of figures around London, each one exhibiting some form of deadness that shows the fallen society that contributes to the Speakerôs paralysis. Sexuality is an organizing principle among the encounters, often in some debased or flawed sense. The sexuality the Speaker encounters is a violated or failed form of fertility. The poem fixates on ideas of fertility from its opening lines, and if the Speaker and the world around him are a waste then fertility is the cure. In his wanderings the Speaker sees all the ways London is squandering and destroying its own fertility, missing or outright ignoring its potential for rebirth. This stage of the journey can be seen in ñA Game of Chessò and ñThe Fire Sermonò. Structurally, the encounters mirror those of Aeneas in that they do not necessarily have a required order; Mr. Eugenides does not necessarily beget the Clerk and Typist. But like the encounters of Dante, The Speakerôs do increase in severity, pulling him more deeply into Hell with each one. The earliest encounters deal in problems like infidelity, whereas the later ones will address rape and violation. It is through these encounters that the Speaker will achieve his metamorphosis; this voyeuristic tour of human weakness will teach him as Dante learned from his tour of sin.

These encounters begin in ñA Game of Chessò and form the first steps of the Speakerôs journey into the Underworld. The first encounter (lines 77-138) finds the Speaker silently listening to and observing a woman, an arrangement that recalls the Hyacinth Girl of ñThe Burial of the Deadò. This first scene highlights the paralysis of the narrator. In wording and rhythm it echoes a description of Cleopatra from *Antony and Cleopatra,* a fragment employed to give some semblance of organization to the scene. Eliot invests a substantial amount of space to describing the room in which the Speaker finds himself, beginning with ñThe chair she sat in, like a burnished throneò (77). Eliot begins with the furniture and casts the chair itself as the

subject of the sentence; the woman sitting on it is almost an afterthought. The Speaker does not return to her for another thirty lines. Instead, he roves about the room, taking in vials of perfume, the ceiling, and a painting over the mantel. He looks anywhere but the woman, doing all he can to avoid interacting with her, until he runs out of things to occupy his thoughts and must at last face her.

The woman breaks the silence once the speaker returns his attention to her. Even before she can speak, she injects noise into the scene. She combs her hair out into ñfiery pointsò (109), an image which conjures words that quickly become ñsavagely stillò (110). The image of hair ñglowing into wordsò is a strange one, but it creates a vivid image of movement invading the Speakerôs silence that he takes refuge in. Her presence is an active one that disturbs the Speakerôs detached voyeurism. However, this movement, this break in silence, does not last long before growing still and joining the rest of the silence. So too do the womanôs following pleas to the speaker. She expresses anxieties that are only answered by the internal musings of the protagonist, colored by his death-focused mind.

The womanôs spoken lines establish more similarities to the Hyacinth Girl. The Hyacinth comments on their relationship and the metamorphosis it has put her through in the public eye, and he is only able to respond within his own thoughts that he is unable to speak. Similarly, the Speaker here cannot directly vocalize anything to the woman, leaving her to press him with unanswered questions. The parallels grow stronger in a line from an earlier draft of ñA Game of Chessò, where the Speaker declares, ñI remember/The hyacinth gardenò (*Facsimile* p. 13, line 50), hinting at a stronger link between the two buried in the poemôs DNA. In both a woman speaks and the Speaker answers silently, locked within his own mind. His thoughts reveal a

preoccupation with death, placing the two in ñratsô alley/where the dead men lost their bonesò (115-116).

The woman of ñA Game of Chessò functions as a different incarnation of the Hyacinth Girl; they may not necessarily be the same character, but the share the same function of exploring the Speakerôs relation to other people. Where the emotion behind the Hyacinth Girlôs speech is unclear, the woman is explicitly anxious, seeking reassurance that the Speaker cannot offer. Even as she inquires about the Speaker and his silence he can only respond with banal internal mutterings. In his essay ñThe Urban Apocalypseò Hugh Kenner identifies this woman as a Dido-esque figure to the sectionôs speakerôs Aeneas (Kenner 43), acting as a sort of obstacle to his developmental journey. While Kennerôs suggestion conveniently lines up with my theory[6], it has more value than simply giving me a buttress. Kennerôs parallel between the woman and Dido raises the question of her purpose. She dominates the focus of over half of ñA Game of Chessò, and so must hold some greater significance. She imposes silence upon the Speaker, presenting a moment of paralysis in which he can do little more than observe her. This passage presents dead sexuality, a relationship that traps the Speaker and acts as a violation of the fertility of heterosexual relationships. Bedient suggests the only way to avoid such a trap is to ñget out of the phallic gameò (Bedient 124), and escape sex entirely.

Following the Speakerôs musings the voice shifts to relay overheard gossip from a nameless woman, only identifiable as the friend of Lil, the woman she is discussing. (lines 139-169) The effect in this section is something like the lavish description that opens ñA Game of Chessò, except with aural rather than visual subjects. No more is seen in this section; instead it

[6] In the same essay Kenner identifies further parallels between *The Waste Land* and *The Aeneid*, on a structural level rather than in terms of allusions.

relays directly a chunk of overheard speech. Lilôs friendôs lines are unquoted, in contrast to the quoted speech of the woman earlier in the section. They are interrupted occasionally by fully capitalized declarations from a bartender, similarly unquoted. The interjection occurs five times, each time reading ñHURRY UP PLEASE ITôS TIMEò (lines 141, 152, 165, 168-169), and is more a feature of the environment than it is the presence of another character. It does not interact with the voice of Lilôs friend except to intrude upon the same aural space. The shift in perspective and speech style could have many explanations. The poem has seemingly changed locations without warning, as it tends to do, or the speech is inside the head of the Speaker, like his earlier unspoken responses to the womanôs questions. No single answer can be easily drawn from the text, but the narrative voice does change to convey a shift in focus. The switch in senses casts the Speaker in even more of an observer role. He has no involvement in this encounter at all except for overhearing it. This focus of the poem shifts outward, from the Speakerôs condition and strained relationship to the deadness in the rest of the world, making way for the more voyeuristic perspective of ñThe Fire Sermonò.

Beyond the threats of infidelity, Lilôs marriage is marred by another crime against sexuality and fertility; abortion. ñI canôt help it, she said, pulling a long face,/Itôs them pills I took, to bring it off, she said. (Sheôs had five already, and nearly died of young George.)ò (lines 158-160) suggests that Lil has taken medicine to escape another pregnancy. But rather than increase her health it leaves her looking ñso antiqueò (line 156) and needing a new set of teeth to remain physically appealing. In attempting to prevent her own fertility, she has been left aged and undesirable. Lilôs marriage presents a further violation of sexual fertility, being both open to intrusion and with pregnancy as a draining force rather than a life-giving one.

ñA Game of Chessò focuses on sterility in the marriages of London, which exposes a crisis at its heart. Marriage, the institution by which a society propagates itself, is failing and society itself is doomed. Despite an earlier wish to avoid including too much of Eliotôs life in my analysis, the presence of the line ñWhat you get married for if you donôt want children?ò (line 164) is particularly telling, being drawn from a comment Vivian Eliot made on the manuscript during the poemôs writing (*Facsimile* 20-21).

"Good night, sweet ladies"

The section ends with a few borrowed lines from Ophelia in ñHamletò, spoken to Gertrude and Claudius shortly before she drowns herself. The fragment serves to conclude The Speakerôs first two encounters with a reference to madness and eventual suicide. Like the Dantean fragment that signals the transition into the Underworld in ñThe Burial of the Deadò, the bit of Shakespeare is an interjection on The Speakerôs part. Opheliaôs madness and suicide are brought on by Hamletôs rejection of her (ñGet thee to a nunneryò), a wound against her own fertility.

Part 3: "The Fire Sermon"

Geography of the Underworld

The physical Underworld space functions differently depending on the story. The Hell of *Inferno* is highly organized in its descending structure, and Dante takes care to render how he navigates it. The Underworld of *The Aeneid* is less organized but still draws on familiar features typical to Classical mythology. Despite their differences, they share some common ground, such

as the Acheron, open fields of people being punished or simply milling about, and fortresses populated by demons and the souls of the damned.

The two specific locations that Eliot explicitly mentions the Speaker passing, London Bridge and the Church of St. Magnus Martyr, are right next to each other, which limits defining the Speakerôs wandering to a few blocks of London riverfront. At several points in the poem, London is also referred to as ñUnreal Cityò, giving it a dreamlike quality that reinforces its double nature as both London but also a wider representation of Hell and modern civilization as a whole. In ñWhat the Thunder Saidò Eliot expands the term even further and likens to other cities of the world: ñJerusalem, Athens, Alexandria/Vienna London/Unrealò (lines 374-376, North 17-18) suggesting a universality to the Speakerôs surroundings and the Underworld he exhumes. He finds it in London, but Eliot suggests that it could be anywhere.

The poem has a geography unto itself, roughly focusing on three locations that the Speaker moves through in a circular manner. The poem begins in a dry, dead land, which serves as an externalization of the Speakerôs own paralysis and inner deadness. This is the titular Waste Land, not only the fallen modern world that the Speaker wanders, but a mental space that collects his personal deadness. With the introduction of Madame Sosostris, the poem moves into the physical world of London/the Underworld, where it will dwell for the next two sections. The location shifts in ñDeath by Waterò to another metaphorical state, the ocean where Phlebas has drowned. This section bears many similarities to the rebirth process in the Underworldôs River Lethe and thus could be considered part of the geography seen in Parts II and III. However, it is also highly metaphorical, and likely only exists within the Speakerôs mind. His physical location in ñDeath by Waterò is both unknown and irrelevant, for he has retreated to a space within his head. ñWhat the Thunder Saidò returns to the Waste Land of the opening, opening with a

mantralike focus on the dryness of the land that recalls the space of the opening. With the bringing of rain, the Speakerôs return signifies his metamorphosis.

While continuing the Speakerôs hellish encounters, ñThe Fire Sermonò also provides the best physical representation of the metaphorical hell. The Speaker ventures out of the indistinct spaces of ñA Game of Chessò and into London proper, centered on the Thames. Eliot renders the city as it is, noisy and crowded, but doubles it with infernal imagery to depict a dirty city of empty, lusting people that demands constant reference to death in the midst of a city overflowing with the living.

The Thames

ñThe Fire Sermonò begins by describing the emptiness of the Thames. The river, once clogged now ñbears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,/Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends/Or other testimony of summer nightsò (177-179). While the image at first seems a positive one, presenting the river as newly unpolluted, it is empty of something beyond physical debris. The Speaker notes that ñThe nymphs are departedò (line 175). The river is also devoid of nature spirits, of anything that might elevate it beyond the material world. Instead it is lifeless, and ñthe wind/Crosses the brown land, unheardò (174-175). The scene is silent and still, sharply in contrast to the cacophonous ending of ñA Game of Chessò.

At the end of the introductory stanza Eliot references Marvellôs ñTo His Coy Mistressò with the lines ñBut at my back in a cold blast I hear/The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to earò (lines 185-186). Eliot twists the original line somewhat, keeping the original rhyme scheme and much of the wording, but replacing Marvellôs image of pursuit by time with death. As he observes the river and its emptiness, the Speaker recalls Marvellôs attempted rally against time, seeing the lifeless land before him and feeling death behind.

Following the Marvell fragment, the next stanza introduces more death imagery. The rat crawling along the riverbank recalls ñratsô alley/Where the dead men lost their bonesò (line 115-116) from ñA Game of Chessò, a strange image of something beyond death, dead men without bones that have left behind their physical forms completely, and all that is left behind is a rat in the alley. The Speaker also sees ñWhite bodies naked on the low damp ground/And bones cast in a little low dry garrett/Rattled by the ratsô foot onlyò (lines 193-195). Taken together, the river becomes even more like the Acheron, its banks clogged with not only scraps of civilization, but with the dead and their remains. The impression is one of total devastation, humanity laid out in abjection. ñYear to yearò (line 195) suggests a permanence or history to the scene, as if it has been and will be played out for some time.

Before the next encounter, the Speaker recalls the rape of Philomel and her eventual transformation (lines 203-206). The story of rape and metamorphosis foresees the next three encounters, each of which deals in some sort of violation.

Mr. Eugenides

Next the Speaker encounters ñMr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchantò (209) who recalls the ñOne-eyed merchantò (52) foreseen by Sosostris earlier. The encounter is a short one, lasting only eight lines (207-214), but Mr. Eugenides is cast as an obstacle to The Speakerôs journey. Sosostrisô cryptic foresight of him includes a second blank card that shows ñsomething he carries on his back, which [she] is forbidden to see.ò (52-53). Sosostris, the closest thing to a guide The Speaker has, sees the merchant hiding something beyond her vision, itself alarming enough. Beyond that, Eugenidesô proposition carries with it homosexual undertones: his request ñin demotic French/To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel/Followed by a weekend at the Metropoleò (lines 212-214) is an attempted seduction away from the Speakerôs course. Such an

offer may seem like escape, both away from the hellish London and from the deadness the Speaker has encountered in heterosexual relationships. But homosexuality in this case is as Bedient points out ña false idolò (Bedient 124), being equally sterile to the sexless relationships seen so far. Eugenides, like Dido and the dead soldiers Aeneas encounters, attempts to pull the Speaker away from his proper path. Eugenides recalls the usurers and sodomites of Danteôs Hell, two groups who violate ideas of fertility. The first makes money, an infertile thing, fertile. The second engage in sex without hope for fertility.

Built into the encounter with Eugenides is a moment of condescension like that found in the pub at the end of ñA Game of Chessò and to a greater degree in the forthcoming meeting of the Clerk and Typist. Eugenidesô request is phrased in ñdemotic Frenchò (line 212), a criticism that has been scaled back at Poundôs suggestion from ñabominable Frenchò (*Facsimile* page 43, line 97). The proposition, then, is obviously something looked down on, both in the undesirable nature of it and in the clumsiness with which it is proposed. Like Lilôs marriage, the sexuality of Eugenidesô proposition is something lesser.

"I, Tiresias"

After Eugenides, the Speaker has encountered and escaped various sexual threats, which bestows on him a sort of enlightenment that allows him to take on the form of Tiresias, which allows him to see humanityôs most debased moment in the poem. The fornication of the clerk and typist is unique as it presents the poemôs only visible example of sexual consummation, though this does not make it any more lifeless than the absent sexuality of ñA Game of Chessò. Rather than a dead relationship, or the threat and implication of infidelity, or the attempted seduction of homosexuality, the Speaker now confronts active modern sexuality, which exposes in full the fallen modern world. The importance of the moment is famously established by Eliot

himself in the notes, where he states, ñWhat Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the essence of the poem.ò (emphasis Eliotôs, North 23).

The Speakerôs assumption of the role of Tiresias is signaled in the stanza following the encounter with Eugenides, in the line ñI Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,/Old man with wrinkled female breastsò (218-219). Tiresias marks another important perspective shift, for a variety of reasons. First, the Speaker further casts himself as the katabatic hero, declaring himself later in the stanza as having ñwalked among the lowest of the deadò (line 246). The past tense implies a degree of fulfillment of the journey, suggesting the Speaker has already attained a significant amount of knowledge from his journey. Indeed, he appears as a more central figure now, though he retains his role as voyeur. Eliot describes him as a uniting figure, one who sits at the center of all the poemôs inhabitants which enables him to pass judgement on the society he has been exploring. If there is a continuity among the women of the poem (The Hyacinth Girl into the woman of ñA Game of Chessò into a woman in ñWhat the Thunder Saidò, each united by lines personifying their hair), then, as Eliot says, ñAll woman are one womanò (Eliot and North 23). There exists a similar continuity among the male figures, if only by the simple fact of their sex. If sex is continuity, then Tiresiasô hermaphroditism supplies the link between sexes. He has been both male and female and thus unites the two. By becoming Tiresias, the Speaker attains that joining position and becomes capable of viewing the whole panorama of society.

Given his status as a seer, Tiresias also recalls Sosostris, who is also a hermaphroditic figure drawn from a crossdressing man in Aldous Huxleyôs *Crome Yellow*[7]. Sosostris herself

[7] Michael North aligns the two in his notes for *The Waste Land* (Eliot and North 6)

recalls the Sibyl of the epigraph, and a progression can be established between the poemôs three seers. The Sibyl introduces the reader into the text and is thus a metatextual guide, with Sosostris fulfilling the role of guide within the text. In assuming the role of Tiresias the Speaker claims the position of his own guide. Though he is not *truly* Tiresias, no more than he is truly in Hell, he employs the fragment of the myth of Tiresias as an organizing principle over his own life. So the Speaker is still guided by the fragments and the idea of Tiresias, but this is a guide under his own power. He becomes a more pure version of the possibly faulty human guide of Sosostris (though her directions will still come to pass; death by water is not far). In his hermaphroditism he truly unites the aspects of humanity, rather than masquerading as such. And he sees with gods-given sight, rather than by ambiguous tarot cards. Another parallel to Dante emerges. At the end of *Purgatorio*, Dante moves beyond the guidance of Virgil, who is both human and Pagan and thus insufficient once Dante crosses from Purgatory into Paradise. Dante exchanges Virgil for Beatrice, who he will again leave behind as he approaches the Absolute itself. The Speaker exchanges Sosostris for Tiresias and by ñDeath by Waterò has left even Tiresias and the rest of the world behind to continue under his own power.

The Clerk and Typist

The Tiresias section continues into the next encounter, the most voyeuristic in the poem as it involves the Speaker least. Indeed, he is not present at all. Following the excursion out into London from the Speakerôs private life, the poem once again narrows its focus to two people in a private moment. The Speaker, having gained the sight of Tiresias, is able to look in where he should not be able to see. And just as Tiresias encompasses all beings of the poem, this interaction serves as a summation of all those the Speaker has seen thus far. As Tiresias he says, ñI Tiresias have foresuffered all/Enacted on this same divan or bed;ò (lines 243-244). In saying

he has ñforesuffered allò the Speaker suggests two implications. First, that he has already seen what he is about to witness again, having already encountered various facets of failed sexuality, which are combined in this encounter. Second, in specifying this foresuffering as a claim by Tiresias he suggests the history of it. ñThe Fire Sermonò looks at flawed modern sexuality and includes references to Tereus and Philomela and La Pia of *Purgatorio*, references that cause sexual violation to hang over everything. Tiresias has seen these stories recur through time; the clerk and typist are simply the latest incarnation of them. The ambiguity of ñthis same divan or bedò suggests a universality to the vision. He is unspecific about where the fornication occurs, but such a fact is irrelevant as it has happened and may still happen anywhere.

The section opens with ñThe typist home at teatimeò (line 222) and goes on to describe the pitiful, disorganized state in which she lives. ñthe violet hourò (line 220) implies evening, but her breakfast is still out, and her room is clogged with clothes that seem to be moved about rather than put away. She is joined by ñthe young man carbuncularò (line 231) for a meager meal of tinned food after which they engage in sex, without much interest but also without objection on her part. His advance is ñunreproved, if undesired.ò (line 238) and ultimately ñencounters no defenceò (line 240).

The Clerk and Typist are the worst of the Speakerôs encounters, the ñmanifestation of abjection, terror or despairò that Falconer notes as the culmination of the katabasis (Falconer 43). They show humanity at its lowest, the Typist living in her own filth and cycling clutter around her room, the Clerk affecting culture (ñUpon whom assurance sits as a silk hat on a Braford millionaireò) even as he forces himself on a woman. The typistôs passivity is the most striking part of this arrangement. She is ñbored and tiredò (line 236), indifferent even as she does not desire the Clerkôs advances. After he has gone, she leaves her body: ñHer brain allows one half-

formed thought to passò (line 251) and ñShe smooths her hair with automatic handò (line 255) depict her body moving of its own accord, the Typist herself not present in its actions. She recalls the bank clerks of ñThe Burial of the Deadò, living yet trudging to work automatically like mobs of the dead.

The quatrains and fragmentation

In Eliotôs earliest drafts, this section of the poem was written in quatrain form with a consistent rhyme scheme. Eliot initially constructed stanzas such as, ñI Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs,/Perceived the scene, and foretold the *rest*,/Knowing the manner of these crawling bugs,/I too awaited the unexpected *guest*ò (emphasis mine, *Facsimile,* page 45, lines 141-144). The form creates a sense of stability, appearing whole and well-defined in the four line form, and having a rhythm in the A B rhyme scheme. It is the imposition of form onto reality, which places the Speaker in control of his reality to some degree. He cannot change the world around him, cannot stop the oncoming fornication of the clerk and typist. He is still trapped as a silent observer, but he attempts to order the world through the fragments of poetic form. Poundôs approach to the section was to eliminate both the form and rhyme scheme, citing Eliotôs poetry as ñnot interesting enoughò, with the above quoted quatrain as ñToo easyò (*Facsimile* page 45). However, the lines Pound erases lack any unifying features. He does not break up the quatrains into couplets, or erase a specific line of each one. Rather, he eviscerates them, seemingly only under the logic of lines he does not like. The space between the quatrains was then removed, turning the stable poetics into a long, breathless paragraph of physical description. The rhyme scheme can still be observed: ñI Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs/Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest-I too awaited the expected guest.ò (lines 228-230) But it is no longer readily apparent or vital to the poetry. It becomes more like a half-formed thought that eludes

completion. And the quatrain has been lumped in with all the others, so any attempt to reconstruct the rhyme scheme only draws the reader into another half-formed rhyme.

Pound intended nothing more than the elimination of what he saw as stale, weak poetry, but the effect is that of a consciousness struggling for form. The Speaker thrusts at stability, but it eludes him even as he attempts to pin it down. Here, Eliot presents the Speakerôs struggle in the rhythm and structure of the poetry itself.

The Song and the Sonnet: poetic order on life

The music from the typistôs gramophone bleeds into mandolin music the Speaker overhears from a bar along the Thames. The abrupt shift in location creates a sense of juxtaposition, placing the automatic recorded music of the typist against the organic instruments from the bar. The new scene is calmer, with the Speaker comparing the music to Arielôs song. He quotes Ferdinand with the line, ñThe music crept by me upon the watersò (line 257) The line was originally used as an expression of peacefulness in contrast to Ferdinandôs sadness at the apparent death of his father. In this calmer world, the Speaker composes a song of his own, relaying his description of the river in short, rhythmic lines that recalls both the bobbing of the boats and the feeling of a song. The river here is hellish in imagery, a river that ñsweats/oil and tarò and carries boats that shove debris away. The boats are colored red and gold, that along with the rippling of the river recalls flame. The song form gives the Speaker a level of protection. He looks upon Hell but is not trapped within its grip. Here, he composes the world into some level of order, turning a chaotic image into a steady song.

Following the song of the river, the Speaker constructs a poem out of three different voices and arranges them in the form of a 14 line sonnet (lines 292-305). The section has a

discernable rhyme scheme, following ABAB for the first stanza and CDCD for the first four lines of the next stanza. Both of these stanzas are quotes separately, spoken by three distinct voices as broken up by the quotation marks.

The first describes herself ñsupine on the floor of a narrow canoe.ò (line 295) while the other shares the typistôs detachment saying, ñWhat should I resent?ò (line 299). The Speaker collects and orders these voices in response to what he has seen throughout ñThe Fire Sermonò, attempting to achieve Eliotôs suggested ñorder upon natural realityò. At the entrance of the third voice, the lines become shorter and less rhythmic, but continue the rhyme scheme.

This sonnet is a complex network of fragments. Eliot draws from three sources; Wagnerôs aforementioned Rhine maidens, Dante, and the structure of the Shakespearian sonnet. Eliot introduces the sonnet with a reference to the maidensô wailing ñWeilala leiaò (line 290), and the departed nymphs from the beginning of ñThe Fire Sermonò also resemble Wagnerôs maidens. The three voices also recall the typist, describing their violation using similarly passive language like that used to describe the typist after her tryst. The arrangement of their speech is structured like an epitaph (North 15), modeled directly after La Pia from Canto V *Purgatorio*, another figure who was violated and undone. This tight arrangement of links and references establishes these voices as inheritors of La Piaôs fate. Eliot, then, is drawing on a source but twisting it for his own ends, which demonstrates a shift in the Speakerôs fragments. Rather than a direct quotation or allusion intruding as a sort of commentary on his surroundings, the Speaker himself conjures and reassembles the voices he has drawn on. He takes form from Dante and traditional sonnets, but the content of the poem is of his modern London. In employing the poetic form of the sonnet, he takes the world around him and give it some semblance of order. The sonnet might serve to finally bring the stability and understanding the Speaker has been working toward,

unlike the aborted quatrains that made Tiresias so unsteady. The successful ordering would then fulfill the katabasis, the Speaker having achieved the knowledge he needed.

The last voice ends the sonnet on a hopeless note, searching for a reason without finding it. Rather than recount her undoing, the last voice is trapped and can only ñconnect/Nothing with nothingò (301-302). The first two voicesô wailing illustrates their pain and undoing with vivid detail. They report birth and death, an entire lifeôs story in four lines. But the third is left focusing on ñThe broken fingernails of dirty handsò (line 303), attempting to make meaning of anything, but unable to do so. It ultimately concludes ñMy people humble people who expect/Nothingò (lines 304-305). The third voice lacks the clarity of the other two, only mentioning Margate. Her people, then, could be anyone, and her disembodied voice adds a universality to her hopelessness. The final line reading only ñNothingò ends the sonnet on a full stop, one last image of futility that encompasses all the Speaker has seen in the past two sections.

After hearing these three desperate voices, the Speaker retreats into mantralike simplicity. Line 306 reads ñla laò, indented to the middle of the line and followed by a marooned one-line stanza of ñTo Carthage then I cameò, a line from Augustine that begins a recounting of his debauched life. At this point the Speaker has come to the lowest point of the katabasis. Through the accumulated horror of the debased modern world, his transformation into Tiresias, and his musical and poetic structuring of the world, he has completed the journey he set out on. Falconer describes this section of the journey as an ñconversion at the bottom of Hellò (Falconer 52). The knowledge the katabasis imparts can only be gained once the hero descends fully. Aeneas only learns of his destiny to father the Roman emperors once he has descended enough to find his father. Orpheus only retrieves Eurydice when he reaches Hades himself. And the Speaker will only learn the key to escaping his paralysis once he has viewed the horrors of the modern world

and felt his voice fail completely. The Speaker has reached the very bottom of Hell and completed his journey, as Dante and Virgil did when they reached Satan in the center. This moment is not necessarily a triumph, however. The bottom of the katabasis brings with it divine revelation, but the Speaker is still not quite whole. The remaining four lines echo ñla laò in their simplicity, taking on a repetitive mantralike focus that focus on purgatorial fire in the way of the Buddha and Danteôs Mount Purgatory.

Part 4: "Death by Water"

The Return

After reaching the bottom of the Underworld, the katabatic hero returns to the surface, changed by the experience and armed with knowledge. A common feature of the return, as identified by Falconer, is a rapid ascent, in contrast to the longer journey down. Aeneas is granted access to a secret gate by his father which allows him to return directly to the beach where his men wait. Dante travels further down, below Satan until gravity reverses itself and returns him to the surface.

The Speakerôs return comes in assuming the form of Phlebas. Much like he casts himself as Tiresias in ñThe Fire Sermonò, in ñDeath by Waterò he becomes the drowned sailor, which serves as a restorative state to contrast the hectic sights and pace of ñThe Fire Sermonò. Like Dante, The Speaker will descend until he returns, traveling deeper under water and ñentering the whirlpoolò (line 318). And like Dante and Aeneas, his return will be much shorter than his descent, ñDeath by Waterò being the poemôs shortest section by far.

The rapid descent creates an interesting pacing dynamic in the katabatic narrative. The vast majority of the katabasis story is spent in the Underworld itself, seemingly wandering

around through the aforementioned encounters. The descent itself is typically short, only requiring finding an entrance and crossing the Acheron. Some groundwork must be laid: Dante must meet Virgil, Aeneas must find the sibyl and follow her instructions. But the entrance to the Underworld tends to occur fairly early in the narrative. The bulk is then spent building toward the conclusion to the journey, which also typically receives a fair amount of attention. But reaching the goal effectively signals the end of the journey. The action of the return is almost an afterthought.

Yet the ascent is still an important moment as it signals the heroôs return to the world left behind. Falconer argues that the quick return is a significant feature in that it inverts the journey, both in terms of narrative structure and the means by which the hero returns. The return is less of an ascent, as it not the inverse of what has come before. The hero does not retrace his steps, instead going deeper to find a way out. Falconer highlights Danteôs descent down the legs of Satan, which eventually inverts gravity and sends him climbing up, as an example. Falconer argues for seeing the katabatic return ñnot as a revelatory experience leading to transcendence of the historical, material world, but as a radical shift of perspective leading down, again down, into the material worldò (Falconer 52). This further descent makes the return not an escape from the worldôs tribulations but a return to it, now better equipped to face it.

Phlebas the Phoenician

In ñDeath by Waterò the Speaker changes form once again, now casting himself as Phlebas the drowned Phoenician sailor. As with Tiresias, taking the form of Phlebas allows the Speaker to gain a different perspective. But if Tiresias as a uniting presence that connected the Speaker to the rest of the world, then Phlebas is the opposite. Tiresias had links to the rest of the poemôs characters by way of his hermaphroditism and place in myth. Phlebas lacks these uniting

characteristics, only recalling the ñdrowned Phoenician sailorò (line 47) and Stetsonôs buried corpse (line 71) of ñThe Burial of the Deadò. In addition, Phlebas is a character wholly of Eliotôs devising and thus does not have any mythological parallels or significance. Rather than blooming outward and seeing things he should not in ñThe Fire Sermonò, the Speaker closes off as Phlebas.

ñDeath by Waterò functions as a restorative lull in the poem in both its content and structure. Following the harrowing cacophony of images that Parts 1-3 produce, Part 4 is comparatively spare, offering a counterpoint to what has come before and clearing the way for the poemôs conclusion. Most obvious is its length; at only ten lines, ñDeath by Waterò is a fraction of the poem as a whole. Its brevity allows it to hold shape unbroken, which the rest of the poem does not. While previous parts flirt with structure, taking on meter and rhyme and abandoning them just as quickly, ñDeath by Waterò sticks with a form that nearly reaches blank verse, composed of a handful of sentences that spread across multiple lines. The effect is a more defined, but also more relaxed voice that contrasts sharply with the musical structure and primal chanting that ended ñThe Fire Sermonò.

The stillness of the structure is mirrored by the images the stanzas present. In his death Phlebas ñForgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell/And the profit and loss.ò (lines 313-314), an image that suggests an escape from worldly troubles. As Phlebas the Speaker is purged of both the physical sensation of the material world and the human experience of life as a series of gains and losses. The next stanza depicts the current ñpick[ing] his bones clean in whispersò (315), another image of separation from the physical world. The use of ñwhispersò in this line carries peaceful connotations, and the overall effect is a sense of release and stability found in death.

Also notable is the sectionôs complete absence of fragments. ñDeath by Waterò as it exists in the final poem is a smaller section of a once much larger piece that itself carried various fragments. The original section was based on Danteôs encounter with Ulysses and the latterôs encounter with the Absolute, so fragments and allusion are in the DNA of the section. However, even in the earliest drafts the ending section with Phlebas was separated from the earlier part by a section break (*Facsimile* 61), and has its origins in an earlier poem Eliot wrote in French, ñ*Dans le Restaurant*ò. Phlebas, then, is solely a creation of Eliotôs. The Phlebas lines have always been somehow separate from the rest of the poem, and the absence of allusion contributes to this fact. The lack of fragments contributes to the sectionôs stillness by presenting an unbroken consciousness. No allusions or quotes intrude.

The River Lethe

The Lethe, the river that induces forgetfulness, is a prominent fixture of the Underworld, being one of five named rivers. After the Acheron (inhabited in the poem as the Thames), the Lethe features most prominently, being a necessary step in the process of rebirth. The Lethe cleanses a soul of its past, clearing it of both its sins and the pains of its past life. This cleansing allows the soul to be reborn into a new, hopefully better, life. However, this rebirth is not a perfect one. The soul emerges changed, metamorphosed into a new being. ñDeath by Waterò functions as the Speakerôs passing through the Lethe after he has reached the lowest point of the Underworld.

Aeneas witnesses the passage of the Lethe during his visit to the Underworld in Book VI of *The Aeneid*. The Lethe here is more tangential, having little to do with the knowledge of Romeôs future that Aeneas travelled to the Underworld to gain. Nevertheless, Anchises establishes the riverôs importance. It is drunk from by ñspirits owed a second life in the bodyò

(960) so that they may forget the pain of their lives. Aeneas expresses confusion at their desire to ñre-enter the sluggish drag of the bodyò (972), which Anchises counters by describing a purgatorial return to life, the souls chastised in the afterlife to be freed of lifeôs flaws until they are prepared to return to life (Heaney page 77). Book VI dwells on death and the consequences of mortal life, with Aeneas shown the future of his descendants and thus the fruit of his journey. In the midst of this sections dwelling on the permanence of death, Virgil includes a passage describing the possibility of an escape from the finality of lifeôs events.

Dante undergoes the passage of the Lethe in Cantos 30-31 of *Purgatorio*. While Danteôs encounter with the Lethe comes well after the close of the katabatic journey of *Inferno*, it still serves the traditionally katabatic role of purifier. After Beatrice chastises him into confessing his sins, she plunges him into the river and purges him of his memories, which she concludes were the source of his sin. He later drinks from the River Eunoe and has his non-sinful memories restored. Rather than be restored as an entirely new person, Dante becomes a more pure version of himself. In this way, the trip through the Lethe becomes refining experience, ridding Dante of his negative past and preparing him for the journey into Paradise.

In both cases, the Lethe is both rebirth and metamorphosis. In Virgil, the souls are not so much reborn as they are carried off into a new body. Yes, this is a rebirth, but not a restoration to what the soul was before. This is a narrow distinction, but I think it is also an important one. The soul being reborn takes on a new body, identity, and life. It is refined by the Lethe and then transformed into a new being. The process is almost chemical. As for Dante, he ultimately retains much of his prior being, albeit without its negative aspects. He overcomes his sinful past and is allowed to continue as a new being, but not one without history. The souls who travel through the Lethe are not merely reborn, but changed. Their flaws are erased and they are left in

a purified state, allowing them to begin a better life. The parallels to Baptism, especially in the case of Dante, are obvious. Eliot strengthens the baptism similarities through his invocation of Augustine at the end of ñThe Fire Sermonò.

ñDeath by Waterò achieves a similar purpose. As Phlebas, the Speaker is refined, the waves picking his bones clear and causing him to ñ[pass] the stages of his age and youthò (316), a reflection of all he has experienced so far. The Speaker sheds his negative experiences: the harrowing of his journey through the Underworld and the paralysis that led him to undertake the journey in the first place are sloughed off in the form of the dead and drowning Phlebas. An additional line suggesting Phlebasôs death as a sort of metamorphosis can be found following the first mention of Phlebas in Sosostrisôs card reading. The line directly after quotes *The Tempest* with ñ(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)ò (line 48), recalling Arielôs song and the sea change. The Speakerôs fulfillment of the promise of Phlebas includes with it the fragment of the sea change, even if the reference does not appear in ñDeath by Waterò itself.

Part 5: "What the Thunder Said"

DA

ñWhat the Thunder Saidò begins with a series of repetitive stanzas dwelling on dryness and describing a wasted space that recalls the ñstony rubbishò of ñThe Burial of the Deadò. The Speaker eventually finds himself at a chapel and declares ñDry bones can harm no oneò (line 390), a statement that refutes death. After spending so much time fixated on bones and bodies, the Speaker expresses a degree of freedom, having seen and faced death buried beneath the living world and experienced a death himself in the form of Phlebas. This realization opens the way for ña damp gust/Bringing rainò (lines 393-394), which in turn allows for the speech of the

Thunder that will ultimately deliver the katabatic knowledge that the Speaker has journeyed to achieve. The arrival of this knowledge is also accompanied by a stylistic shift in the voice and rhythm of ñWhat the Thunder Saidò. Line 394 is short and simple, contrasting sharply with ñWhat the Thunder Saidôsò blocky stanzas. Line 394 is a brief, hard stop to this rhythmic mediation on dryness that allows for the shift to the DA section, which is more fluid in its line lengths.

The knowledge the katabasis imparts is represented through the Thunderôs three commands. If the Speakerôs realization in line 390 frees him from his death-obsessed mind, then the commands offer a way around his earlier encounters. Each expresses a single command (give, control, compassion), drawn directly from a similar scene in the Upanishads. But Eliot intersperses the commands with sections of poetry that expand on their ideas and establish links back to the poemôs earlier characters.

Datta

ñThe awful daring of a momentôs surrender/which an age of prudence can never retractò (lines 403-404) recalls the typist, a victim of the clerkôs empty lust which she saw no reason to accept or reject. She surrenders herself for a moment, and is relieved when it passes, but can never undo the act. However, the Speaker goes on to establish an inverse of this surrender, instead suggesting the acceptance of a higher governing power, such as the thunder and its commands. Here, ñsurrenderò takes on similar connotations to the Islamic connection of Godôs will. The Speaker expounds the necessity of this moment of surrender, saying, ñBy this, and this only, we have existed/Which is not to be found in our obituariesò (line 405-406). Like the typistôs surrender, surrender to a higher power is a private, momentary decision that would not be known or recorded as part of a personôs life. But the Speaker suggests that this personal

surrender is more necessary than any external action. The command ñdataò means ñgiveò, with surrender taking the form of giving oneself in full.

Dayadhvam

Eliot cites the source of the lines in this stanza as Count Ugolino from Canto 33 of *Inferno* (North 26). The lines ñI have heard the key/Turn in the door once and turn once only/We think of the key, each in his prison/Thinking of the key, each confirms a prisonò (lines 410-413) suggest isolation, recalling the Speakerôs intense internality. Unable to speak, with only his thoughts for company, the Speaker has imprisoned himself, and he suggests that focusing on this imprisonment only ñconfirmsò it, trapping him further. Rather than ruminate on internality, the command ñdayadhvamò demands compassion, an action that is similarly internal but focuses outward toward external connection. Compassion, then, is the tool by which the Speaker can bridge the gaps between him and the rest of the world that he has been cut off from.

Damyata

ñThe boat responded/Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oarò (lines 411-412) recalls Phlebas, both in the image of a sailor and in the action of the line ñOh you who turn the wheel and look to windwardò (line 320) from ñDeath by Waterò. The idea of control contrasts with the world out of control that the Speaker has seen. Control offers an avoidance of the fate of Phlebas, never having to purge oneôs failings in the Lethe in the first place.

“Shall I at least set my lands in order?”

Following the commands, the Speaker casts himself as the Fisher King, an image that recalls ñThe Fire Sermonò and the lines ñWhile I was fishing in the dull canal/On a winter evening round behind the gashouse/Musing on the king my brotherôs wreck/And on the king my

fatherôs death before himò (lines 189-192). The original image is polluted, fishing in a canal of the Thames by a factory and thinking on death. The image in ñWhat the Thunder Saidò is cleaner, lacking the clogged civilization of ñThe Fire Sermonò and with the dry land behind. Rather than think about death the Speaker wonders about the possibility of organizing himself and the world with his new knowledge, which he then does.

These fragments I have shored against my ruins

The Waste Land ends in the same manner it plays out; in a flurry of different voices and references. Line 426 depicts London Bridge falling, using the nursery rhyme ñLondon Bridge is falling downò. The line depicts civilization in apocalyptic collapse and returns to the poemôs time spent on the Thames. The Speaker has seen the world in collapse, a phenomenon that has permeated even into a childrenôs nursery rhyme. Line 427, ñHe hid himself in the fires that refine them,ò references Dante once more, pulling on an image of purification and cleansing from *Purgatorio*. Line 428, ñWhen shall I be like the swallow?ò reprises earlier references to Philomela, asking for metamorphosis away from horror. Line 428, ñThe Prince of Aquitaine of the ruined towerò is an image of decay from a starkly melancholic poem that presents a figure presiding over ruins and nothingness.

The most important line is Eliotôs: ñThese fragments I have shored against my ruinsò (line 430). In the simplest terms, it is Eliotôs final word in the poem. The rest of the quotations do belong to him by his placing them in the poem, but the use of his own lines both unites and comments on the others. Without it, the lines would not lose their meanings, but their only function would be the introduction of a collection of images and ideas. Line 430 gives those images and ideas a purpose, and as Eliotôs last line in the poem serves as his final word and thus determines the poemôs ultimate conclusion. At the beginning of his analysis, Bedient expresses a

desire to decide the poemôs ñdispositionò, whether it is ultimately optimistic or pessimistic about the world it renders. Bedient states that the answer cannot really be found without understanding how the poem itself *works*, without understanding existence or lack thereof of a unifying narrator (Bedient ix). ñThe two issues are linked in that, until the second is really taken out of the storehouse to which it is usually confined and thoroughly aired, examined front and back, the first must remain subject to a chance accumulation of impressions taken from the poemò. The core of Bedientôs argument is that the poemôs conclusions cannot be properly understood without first understanding the manner in which they are formed. So a reading of *The Waste Land* as a katabasis allows the poem to be a journey of both unveiling and transformation, its ñdispositionò as Bedient sees it, toward overcoming turmoil and learning to face the world.

After being Eliotôs last original line, the most interesting thing about line 430 is the ambiguity with which it can be read. Most of the line is simple enough: ñThese fragments I have shoredò is fairly straightforward. The Speaker has used the fragments to prop something up. The double nature of the line comes in the last two words. ñagainstò, and ñruinsò are simple words, but each has a double meaning that leads to two different conclusions. ñAgainstò could mean physical contact, such as ñleaning againstò, one thing being placed onto another. Paired with ñshoredò, the word conjures the image of a sort of buttress, one thing being placed to support another. Against also suggests a sort of opposition, such as Hamletôs ñtake arms against a sea of troublesò. Here, the word faces outward, a shield rather than an architectural feature. ñRuinsò could refer to two nouns, one a concrete thing and the other a more abstract concept. The first is something that has been ñruinedò, something once whole that has been destroyed or has decayed in time. When he is introduced, the Speaker himself is a ruin, stuck between death and life. The second is the concept of something ñbeing ruinedò, being subject to a destructive

force. Both meanings are ultimately the same, but the timing is different. The first has already happened, while the second is happening now or could in the future. It is important to note the ñmyò that precedes the word, marking the ruins as belonging to the Speaker.

The first interpretation of the line suggests that the fragments can be used as a buttress against the collapsing Speaker. In this case, he truly is ñle prince dôaquitaine a la tour abolieò, lord of a ruin that nonetheless remains standing. The katabasis allows him to ñconnect nothing with nothingò and find some measure of peace in the fragments. Bedient expresses an interpretation along these lines. ñHis lands are at once his óruinsô and whatever he can shore, from outward, against themé the ruins must not be allowed to decline any further, into altogether meaningless stony rubbishò (Bedient 211). The second interpretation turns the ruin into an act upon the Speaker, the paralyzing contact with the world that left everything as ñstony rubbishò in ñThe Burial of the Deadò. Shoring against these ruins means being protected against further ruin, not simply curing the Speakerôs condition but preparing him against its return.

Of course, line 430 is followed by line 431 and a voice of madness. ñHieronymoôs mad againeò is the threat of future ruin, the mental instability that has already plagued the Speaker once. This statement, that he has shored up himself up and shored against future problems, completes the katabasis. The Speaker, so fractured and fragile when he was introduced, ends by repeating the wisdom he has learned with line 432: ñDatta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.ò. Each one is its own sentence, lending a weight and strength to each word that reinforces its position as a shield and support. The final line ñShantih Shantih Shantihò (line 433) is another meditative statement like the ending of ñThe Fire Sermonò, which Eliot notes as ñóThe Peace which passeth understandingôò (North 26). The Shantihs are set indented in their own stanza, large spaces between, them. They appear stable and whole, ending the poem on a note of full peace.

Conclusion

In the course of this essay I have attempted to identify a narrative within *The Waste Land*, though in the process I have more likely imposed one. First and foremost, my reading depended on the assumption of a Speaker, though in the process I encountered many possible objections to one primary Speaker figure. First and foremost, the poem never necessitates one particular speaker, and once a speaker figure is inserted certain scenes become more difficult to reconcile. In my analysis of the end of ñA Game of Chessò, for example, I encountered a degree of difficulty in establishing the presence of the Speaker. Ultimately, the scene does not require a Speaker to be present, and the same is true for several moments in the text. Forcing a figure into these sections adds elements to Eliotôs poetry that complicate my theories more than they might illuminate. So while the poem may contain moments of lyric voice from a narrator figure, such a figure does not so easily appear in every section of the poem, and to argue that the poem is all the act of one Speaker limits the potential of its fragmented nature. A Speaker figure may offer more of a sense of unity to the poemôs disparate parts, but at the cost of the poemôs individual approach to narrative.

However, the difficulty of establishing a central narrative within the poem is less a failure of my theories than it is a better look at the structure of the poem. Narratives appear, then disappear, and attempting to fold the poemôs mercurial nature into a neat box loses something of its essence. Rather, the poem contains a tension with narrative, suggesting it and reaching toward it, but never becoming narrative. This tension should not be treated as an obstacle; rather, it is the nature of the poem. Eliot does not deal in an ever-shifting voice for the sake of difficulty, but instead to approach narrative in a new way. He focuses on similar concepts, such as depersonalization, metamorphosis, and the katabatic journey, to name a few, but conveys them

from different angles by means of his cast of narrators. As such the poem resists a simple reading and makes difficult any one unifying theory. Just as Bedientôs ventriloquist theory needed to bend Eliotôs lines into place, my katabatic reading neglected or outright excluded lines that did not easily contribute to it. Addressing narrative in *The Waste Land*, then must address the tension between narrative and complete disorganization. The poem must have some degree of order; it is split into defined sections and references itself through figures such as Phlebas. But the poem, being fragmented in its nature, is not orderly, and this inherent conflict with narrativity must be accepted rather than eliminated.

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